

NEWS

Department of Public Health and Human Services

www.dphhs.mt.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 17, 2011

Contact: Jon Ebelt, Public Information Officer, DPHHS, (406) 444-0936

Chuck Council, Communications Specialist, DPHHS, (406) 444-4391

Flood Water Can Contaminate Private Wells

Officials with Montana's Department of Public Health and Human Services and Department of Environmental Quality are urging private well owners who have experienced recent flooding on their property to have their water tested.

Home owners who depend on private wells for their drinking water should inspect their wells for damage and have the water tested for contaminants.

A common mistake made by flood victims is to not test their well water as they recover their homes, even if the appearance of the water is clean. "Just because well water looks and smells clean doesn't mean it actually is," said DPHHS Director Anna Whiting Sorrell.

Flooded wells can contain unseen contaminants, such as coliform bacteria. Also, items such as paint, chemicals, motor oil, garbage, and pet waste can be washed into the well and present a health hazard.

Testing requires laboratory analysis. "The Montana Public Health Laboratory is available for home owners to test their well water," said Anne Weber of the DPHHS Laboratory Services Bureau.

Information about how to collect samples can be provided by a local county sanitarian or a local or tribal health department. There is a fee associated with testing the well water. Information is also available from the DPHHS state laboratory at 1-800-821-7284.

Weber is asking well owners to not use water from a flooded well. "Until the flood water has receded, the well has been properly disinfected, and bacterial samples show the water is safe to use, well owners need to be wary of using it, especially for drinking water," she said.

Boiled or disinfected water can be used on a limited basis, such as for cleaning. Use bottled water for drinking and food preparation. Local health departments can provide guidance for well owners. Safe water use information is available on both DEQ and DPHHS websites at www.deq.mt.gov or www.dphhs.mt.gov. Also available on the website is guidance about how to sanitize a well.